Hi Tom. The questions I would send most people are significantly different from what's here, so I apologize for the delay in sending you this list, but I more or less had to make it from scratch, especially after some great suggestions I got from Edmund McMillen.

Please don't feel pressured to answer *everything* here, but the more you answer, the more I'll have to work with. For a lot of the questions below, I wasn't exactly at an age you might call self-aware. (I was about seven years old around the time Pico's School came out!) So, the more detail you can add, the better!

- **Tell me about yourself as a person. I know about Tom Fulp, the Flash myth and legend, but I don't know about Tom Fulp, the average guy.**

I'm not particularly interesting when you remove all the Newgrounds and video game stuff. I have two sons so when I'm not at the computer I'm either spending time with family or exercising to keep my anxiety in check.

- **What are your favorite Flash games? Condition: not your own.**

Phoenotopia was one of the last big Flash games NG sponsored and it remains one of the most ambitious, so I like that we went out with a bang. I'm a big fan of Abobo's Big Adventure, a ten year project that encapsulates so much of what was fun about the Flash era. There are games like Toss the Turtle and Miami Shark that I think are good representatives of the quick fun you can have with web games. I love Edmund McMillen's games, with Spewer and Time Fcuk being two examples. The Henry Stickmin series by PuffballsUnited is charming, Thelemite by Sosker is lots of fun, Obsolescence by Connor Ullmann is a cool bullet hell and The Game series by Nicky Case is really clever. Snailiad, Level Up and Redder are great Metroidvanias.

- **Tell me about the history of New Ground. How did it end up going from fan zine to Flash site? (And what's your favorite Neo Geo game?)**

I originally used the name New Ground for my Neo Geo fanzine when I was 13 and running a Neo Geo fan club on the Prodigy dial-up service. It just sorta made sense to me to keep using the name when I set up my first website in 1995. My original web games were point and click html, then javascript and ultimately Flash starting in 1998. My favorite Neo Geo game was Samurai Shodown 2.

- **I understand that Newgrounds was a victim of the dot-com bubble. What made you keep it going even under that kind of almost apocalyptic pressure? How did you get out of it?**

Newgrounds started as something I did for fun and I think that's why I keep doing it even when it's not commercially viable. When the dot com bubble burst, Newgrounds was part of Troma's hosting network which helped to keep the site on-line, although it wasn't running very well for a few years when things were at their worst. In 2003 we resumed control of the hosting and fortunately the landscape improved, with new ad companies and less expensive bandwidth options.

- **How different was the smaller community in the late 90s/early 2000s compared to the mid-2000s, when Flash had truly taken off?**

The community started out as people who were fans of the content but as the number of people making stuff grew, it shifted into more of a creator community. The one thing I didn't like about the mid-2000s is that some creators would be at odds with each other because everyone was fighting for the spotlight; the spotlight on NG felt really important until sites like YouTube came along and made it look more trivial.

- **Who were some of the unsung heroes of the earliest days of Newgrounds, staff and/or contributors?**

Ross Snyder is responsible for actually programming the automated Portal, making it possible for people to publish their Flash to the site instantly. Tim Miller was in charge of our post-Troma hosting and really had to do a lot with a little in terms of budget and hardware. James Holloway also stepped in as a developer early on and got a lot of things running better as we came out from the dot com crash.

In terms of contributors in the early years, people like Stamper, Brian Beaton, MindChamber, Krinkels, Doomhammr, McFretn, Zeebarf, Jeremy Lokken, Randy Solem, Edmund McMillen, Neil Cicierega, Matzerath, Rob Denbleyker, AlantheBOX, PsychoGoldfish, Dan Paladin and Roger Barr all consistently entertained, along with too many others to name here. By 2004 we had people like Adam Phillips and David Firth showing up, who would go on to make big names for themselves in the years ahead.

- **Tell me about how you used to manually add portal submissions to the site. What were your restrictions? Did you just take everything that came in?**

I didn't post everything but I posted a lot of it. I don't know that I really had any restrictions but no one was really testing the limits with the things they emailed me.

- **Where did the idea of the automatic Portal come from?**

It grew out of necessity where not only were people emailing me Flash files every day, people with existing entries were emailing me updates to their files. I wanted a system where people could do that themselves and a lot of the features grew out of the needs of that system. For example I knew we wouldn't have unlimited storage, so we went with a Gong Show style approach where users could vote content off the site during a judgment phase. The voting bar was inspired by the review scores in Game Pro magazine. The daily voting for XP was inspired by Legend of the Red Dragon, a popular dial-up BBS game I played every day in high school where you had a daily allotment of forest fights.

- **You were entering unexplored territory when it came to the automatic Portal. What problems did you go up against when you made it originally?**

I think the Portal was a great example of "not knowing any better", where any seasoned business person would back away from the amount of liability it entailed. We've been fortunate not to have bigger problems and are always working to reduce the potential for problems, such as efforts to keep unlicensed music off the site and to give people better options for sourcing their music via the Audio Portal. My biggest problem with NG is that I'm a bit of a prisoner to it, where I can't ignore it for a day without concern for what fire might be burning somewhere.

- **What was the initial reaction to the Portal from the community? How did the submission numbers go up and down over the years?**

Most people were really excited when The Portal launched but there were some who grumbled about The Portal taking over the site, saying they missed the "old" Newgrounds from before The Portal. I think about that as a reminder there will always be people who want things to stay the way they were, but you gotta do what keeps you interested and motivated or else everything gets stagnant.

Submission numbers climbed steadily into the 2007-2009 era, then maybe bottomed out around 2014-2015 era and have been on a gradual rise since. I feel like it took Flash being removed from browsers before the light bulb went off in people's heads and they realized Newgrounds was still working.

- **What do you think of sites like YouTube, which more or less have the same base concept?**

YouTube was frustrating in the beginning because a lot of its early growth was from stolen content. For example if anyone missed a TV show, they knew they could go watch it on YouTube. Meanwhile, of their top ten most popular content in the early years, entries like Charlie the Unicorn, Potter Puppet Pals and Numa Numa all had roots on Newgrounds. Then Google bought YouTube and made it extremely difficult,

dare I say impossible, to compete with. It still bothers me that if you Google an animation that originated on Newgrounds, the YouTube version will be first in search results.

- **What do you think about the culture of Newgrounds, and the people that inhabit it? What influence did you have, and what influence did the wider world have? Did it change as the site grew?**

I think an overarching theme of Newgrounds has been as an anti-establishment destination. My influences came from video games, electronic music and anime, along with shows like Liquid Television and movies like Robocop. Coming of age in the 90s, there were a lot of “censorship” battles going on, such as mandatory record labeling and Mortal Kombat having white blood on the SNES. The web was a massive departure from the tightly-controlled mainstream media environment and it made it fun to do the opposite of what they were doing. As time passed, I feel a lot of us got this out of our system and the focus has shifted more to creating great original work vs being edgy. The site has mellowed out a lot.

- **In relation to the above, how did the visitors of Newgrounds help or hinder the content creators? What was their approach to rating, commenting and critiquing games?**

The visitors could be harsh but their feedback was often brutally honest and a lot of people do think it helped them improve, while others were discouraged. I’d explain it as the difference between what your artist friends will tell you about your work, vs overhearing what an everyday teenager thinks of your work.

- **Who and what would you credit with Newgrounds being the size it was back then, and is today?**

Pre-Portal, Newgrounds was a top 600 website based on my own games, although my own games wouldn’t have been able to sustain that long-term. It’s really thanks to everyone who participated in the site that it got as big as it was and continues to have an audience today. We’ve had huge stars like Egoraptor and the Friday Night Funkin’ crew over the years but it’s the combined effort of everyone sharing their work that keeps it going.

- **How did you discover Flash originally?**

I think the first thing I stumbled on was a design company using Flash, maybe Gabocorp. Design firms would make fancy websites to showcase their skills and promote their services. A lot of it was interactive interfaces but it was perfect for the sort of animated point and click games with audio I wanted to make.

- **What were the earliest Flash games like?**

Because Flash was limited early on, most of what you could do was clicking on buttons to make animations play. You could make a multi-choice story game, for example. I enjoyed making shooting games, since you could shoot moving targets and have them react to being hit. I made a shooting game tutorial on NG to show people how to do things with interactive moving targets.

In my games if you didn't shoot a target in time, it would play its own shooting animation, which would call a nextFrame action on your health bar. When your health bar got to the last frame of animation, it would send you to the game over screen. Everything was based on animation timelines and events that told them to go to specific frames.

Some of the best early Flash games I played were on Orisinal, which launched in 2000 after Flash had support for variables. All of the games there were made by Ferry Halim and each one was well-crafted and thought out.

- **What drew you to making Flash games?**

I was already making web games with html and javascript so Flash was the next logical step, since I could incorporate animation and sound. I really loved the accessibility of the web as a place to play games, without having to download and install mystery files.

- **What made you want to push its limits and make something like Pico's School?**

I had been cranking out a lot of small games but I tried to do something new with each game and make it better than the last. With Pico I had already created games for two other characters in the same universe but I wanted Pico's game to go to another level, in every way possible.

- **What made you give Pico's School *that* sense of humour? Still got that same sense of humour twenty years later?**

I still have plenty of dark thoughts but it's awkward having to live alongside your creations and I don't like spreading negative feelings, so my goal is to be more creative and thoughtful with how I express those thoughts in my ongoing work. I think being over-the-top was also a bit of a crutch because I didn't have the confidence to tell a good story or make a good game otherwise. I still don't have that confidence but I'm trying.

- **How did you make Pico's School under the limitations of Flash 3? What are the neat technical details about making it?**

So the big thing about Pico's School on the technical side was that Flash 3 didn't have support for variables, so there wasn't a traditional way to track events in a game. To get around this I built a web of movieclips to control what happens. For example, there could be a movieclip that plays when you enter a hallway. If that movieclip is on the first frame when told to play, frame two will have some TellTarget actions that tell movieclips on the screen to go to specific frames. If you perform an action that changes the status of that hallway, that movieclip gets set to a frame further in the timeline. When you return and the movieclip plays, a different set of TellTarget actions are performed. Imagine that for a bunch of different things.

I also had my previous tricks, like the health bar that's just an animation timeline. The action sequences were all shooting-based with different gimmicks for each boss. The final boss had things like eyes that would charge up to shoot lasers, so you had to shoot each eye to reset the charging animations.

- **What were the biggest games around the time of Pico's release?**

JoeCartoon's Gerbil in a Microwave was released around the same time, which might be the most noteworthy. It's hard to recall much from that period, since Flash was more about animation and menu interaction.

- **How influential do you think Pico was in both the making of and playing of web games?**

I think Pico was a good demonstration of Flash's potential for gaming on the web but I also think it was inevitable as long as Flash continued to improve as it did.

- **How fast did Flash technology really advance in terms of updates to the Player? How quick did the games catch up with these updates?**

At the time it felt like updates were coming at a reasonable rate and it was exciting to dive into each new version and make use of the new abilities. For example Flash 4 added variables and keyboard support, which I put to use in a game called Samurai Asshole. The keyboard support was weird, though; it treated input like when you hold down the "a" key and first you see a single "a" and then after a pause, you see a stream of "aaaaaaa". For Samurai Asshole I tried to hide this by making the character walk further than a single key tap, to hide the delay. I have since learned I likely could have avoided all of that by using onpress and onrelease, instead of checking if the key was down at that moment.

Flash 4 also didn't have depth swapping yet, so for Samurai Asshole I actually had two versions of every enemy and I would show and hide one based on if they were in front of or behind the player. For me as an AS2 fan, Flash basically peaked at Flash 8, although Flash 6 was near-peak.

- **Did Adobe / Macromedia ever add anything weird or unusual that people ended up using in cool ways?**

There's probably a great story here but nothing is popping into my head at the moment.

- **At what point did the switch flick on in your head that Flash games would end up being worth money, not only to advertise on, but to sponsor?**

The switch flicked when other sites started paying to put their logos in the games on Newgrounds. Dan from ArmorGames would be good to talk to about that! At first it wasn't a huge benefit to NG to have a logo in a game because most of the games were solely being played on NG already, however as other Flash game sites grew in popularity, it became a good way for NG to promote itself on those sites the same way they promoted themselves on NG.

- **Did you ever create sponsorships or deals? How did they work? How would you know what was worth sponsoring?**

NG sponsored a lot of games, for a good while we averaged one game a week. People would approach me with proposals to sponsor their games; generally they would shop the game around to the top sites to see who could pay the most. That process was eventually automated via FlashGameLicense, where sites could bid on Flash game sponsorships like an auction.

In terms of knowing what was worth sponsoring, I would sponsor games if I thought they were cool and could afford to sponsor them at the moment. I never got into the metrics / analytics side of it all.

- **When did those opportunities start to decline? Did declining rates of Flash games in general follow as well?**

I could feel it coming in the years ahead but for me 2012-2013 was when everything really went down the tubes. The whole "death of Flash" movement was demotivational to developers but also the sponsorship money was drying up, as more and more of the ad dollars were sucked up by Facebook and Google's highly targeted and personalized ad formats. Newgrounds already had the lowest ad rates of all the gaming sites due to not being brand-friendly and things only got worse.

- **Any unique challenges ever come up over the course of running Newgrounds?**

The death of Flash is definitely up there as a big hurdle we had to overcome. Beyond accommodating new formats and maintaining existing Flash content, there has been a big public perception problem where most people assumed Newgrounds had to also die if Flash was dying. It's hard to make people confident about your website when they have that association.

- **About your own Flash games, how did your game making skills develop over the course of these twenty years?**

I kept making bigger games, leading to Alien Hominid for consoles in 2004 and Castle Crashers in 2008. I've made a bunch of web games along the way but my biggest project has been Nightmare Cops, which I've been working on since 2012. I still use Flash and AS2 so in that regard my game making skills have been a bit stifled but I try to improve where I can. I really like the Flash workflow and I don't think I could pull off Nightmare Cops any other way. Maybe Nightmare Cops will make people wish they were making games with Flash and AS2.

- **Are you willing to go over the process of making a Flash game? The technical side of how you made graphics and sound, how coding AS worked, how it all came together.**

So one of the more unique things about Flash is that you can write code on the same timeline where you have animation. This can be really handy because if a character is performing an animation that has a sound on a specific frame, you can just code it on that frame of the timeline. If they have a collision box that checks for impact with other characters, you can pop that box right on the timeline and run some code alongside it.

This can get messy of course so most serious programmers will advise against it. I put a lot less on the timeline than I used to but I still make use of it for things that are convenient. For coding I use AS2, which is similar to javascript. I'll put the entire level together on the Flash timeline and put down markers for things that get referenced later by code. My web games all consist of a single SWF file but for something like Nightmare Cops, each level can be several SWF files and each character is an individual SWF file that all gets loaded in and out of a main file.

I personally like Flash because it works how my brain works; it's how I wanted game development to work even before Flash existed. I would animate in Deluxe Paint IV on an Amiga and program in PASCAL on a PC and was like, what would it take to be able to write code in Deluxe Paint and make my characters move around?

- **How did it get more complicated as time went on and Flash got more and more features via updates?**

The updates to AS2 felt like great improvements vs feeling more complicated, although I was fortunate to ride along with the incremental changes. The introduction of AS3 is where I could say things got more complicated. A lot of devs totally loved AS3 and for many, AS3 is the thing that got them to start making Flash games. For others, however, AS3 was a higher barrier to entry and it put up a wall for people who otherwise might have gotten into making games with AS2. I think a lot comes down to how people's brains work and how they want to go about making games.

- **Were there any interesting technical challenges you ran into while working on Flash games?**

Besides working around limitations like lack of variable support or lack of depth swapping, there is also weirdness with how Flash implemented certain things. For example in AS2 if you want to control the volume of a sound, setting the volume of it will actually set that volume for ALL of the sounds. To get around this, you need to make a unique movieclip container for each sound that is going to have a unique volume. It kinda makes sense but also trips people up at the same time.

- **What was collaborating on Flash games like?**

Collaborating on Flash games is one of the most fun things about Flash and I think it's more fun than other tools because the artist and programmer are working in the same software. There's something about being able to work with the artist's original movieclips vs generating a bunch of sprite sheets that makes Flash feel more human to me.

- **When your own games would go viral (starting with Pico and Alien Hominid and moving up to something akin to The Room), how did you react each time? Was it different for some compared to others?**

Each time feels great and you miss it when it's gone! Sometimes the Internet surprises you and something becomes viral all over again, like Pico did this past year as a result of the success of Friday Night Funkin'. That felt a little more overwhelming and awkward the second time around, though.

- **How did you end up getting a console publishing deal for Alien Hominid?**

We made Alien Hominid ourselves without a publisher but at the time you needed a publisher to release a retail console game, due to various factors like retail stores expecting a line-up of multiple games before doing business with anyone. We had offers for money up front but went with one that let us retain control of the intellectual property. When XBLA came along it was still the expectation that a publisher would be involved but we pushed hard to publish Alien Hominid HD ourselves and are grateful that Microsoft changed their policy, opening a lot of new doors.

- **Do you think the community treated you any different - less or more criticism, or something else - because you're the guy who runs Newgrounds? What did you think of them in this case?**

With Alien Hominid, the response was really positive and I felt insecure about that. My feeling was that people were being extra nice because it was a charming indie story and otherwise they would have been harder on the flaws. A lot of that insecurity motivated me with Castle Crashers, where I wanted to prove to myself Alien Hominid wasn't a fluke. The insecurity never stops, though; now I want Nightmare Cops to prove Castle Crashers wasn't a fluke.

- **What game of yours are you the most proud of?**

I'm the most proud of Castle Crashers because before Nightmare Cops, it was the game I had put the most work into and it got the biggest validation all around, in terms of popularity, awards, financial success, etc. It feels good to put everything you have into something and have it not fail!

- **Are you able to draw a comparison between Adobe and Macromedia's handling of Flash pre-and-post buyout?**

With Macromedia it felt like every version of Flash was a big improvement over the last. After Adobe took over, Flash updates no longer seemed game-changing. I like to imagine a future where Flash succeeded but I don't want to play armchair quarterback because I know software is hard.

- **Do you think Adobe buying Flash at the end of the day caused more damage than it would have if Macromedia hadn't been bought out?**

I don't know what would have happened if Adobe hadn't bought Flash, it's possible Macromedia would have gone out of business and Flash would have stopped right there.

- **At what point did Flash go into "freefall" in the public consciousness, in your point of view?**

I think the Steve Jobs “Thoughts on Flash” letter had an extremely detrimental effect on Flash, although what happened was likely going to happen regardless. The letter basically cemented the public perception of where Flash was going and accelerated the downfall. I’ll note that for being big on “open standards”, Apple sure is slow to support web standards that support gaming outside the app store, such as WebGL2, WebGPU and gamepad support.

- **Have you ever met anyone blatantly anti-Flash or anti-Flash games specifically? Did you try to change their mind? Were you successful?**

I’ve seen plenty of people on-line who are against Flash as a browser plugin but not really people who are against Flash games. I do think in the early days, there were a good number of traditional game devs who looked down their noses at Flash games, however I think that changed as Flash games improved. I’ve never personally tried to argue with someone who is against Flash, I just try to show what is cool about it.

- **What didn’t you like about Flash as a platform or piece of software, either during its peak or fall? Anything specifically egregious worth mentioning?**

I think it would have been amazing if Flash had grown to include export options that included “Xbox”, “Playstation”, basically whatever console platform you want to run your game on. I wish they could have kept doing things in the AS2 space for people like me but that’s a big ask. Ruffle is using hardware acceleration to run classic games in fullscreen mode, something the traditional Flash player never did well.

- **Any opinions on the state of the indie gamedev industry, and what it was like compared to Flash at its rise & peak?**

The indie game industry seems to be doing pretty well, although I think there are a lot of people like me who have gotten themselves stuck working on games for many years longer than planned and it’s a bummer to think of all the really cool games that may never get finished. I think the fun thing about the Flash scene is people could make small games and get decent payouts from sponsors and ads, whereas nowadays you have to invest a lot more in your game and the return may be a lot less, although it can also be much, much more.

- **How do you feel about Flash having gone away from browsers?**

I get why it had to happen, being that it was a closed system with security concerns. I wish it could have made the transition that is currently being made by initiatives like Ruffle, although I don’t think browser tech wasn’t ready fast enough

to support all the necessary features. Ruffle benefits from features that didn't exist when Flash was winding down years ago.

- **How do you feel about HTML5 games today?**

HTML5 games have come a long way, especially in terms of the tools available to make them. Games made with Unity are cool but remain bloated and slow to load, while games made with tools like GameMaker and Construct, or frameworks like Phaser, GODOT and Pico-8 have been working really well. There are some HTML5 games from early in the transition that no longer work in browsers, which is a testament to how well Flash did with always working in every browser ever, up until the end..

- **How have you used Flash outside of its usual wheelhouse of browser games & animation? I know that Castle Crashers is Flash in some shape or form.**

I still use Flash for all of my game development, including Nightmare Cops.

- **Where do you think you'd be without Flash having existed?**

I had been working in web development in the pharma and finance industries when NG took off and became my full time job, so I think I would have likely continued on that path and making games might never have been more than a hobby at best.

- **Clearly you approve of technologies like Ruffle and AwayFL. How important are they to the future of Flash?**

I think they are extremely important to the future of Flash preservation, since they provide a path for Flash to keep running, in particular in browsers where it was always intended. I look forward to people continuing to make Flash games in the future as a hobbyist scene, the same way people still make games for classic consoles.

- **Do you think Flash will ever come back at even a fraction of the relevance it used to have?**

I don't think Flash will ever be as relevant as it was but I could see it having a moment where people rediscover it and have fun with it again.

- **Edmund tells me you have a lot of good stories related to your work. I'd love to hear any of them that you can remember.**

One of my first paid Flash projects was an “Ask the Penis Monster” game I made for Troma, to promote Tromeo & Juliette, a movie directed by James Gunn long before he made Guardians of the Galaxy. Yahoo had a print magazine called Yahoo Internet Life and they asked Tommy Lee from Mötley Crüe what his favorite thing on the Internet was and he said it was the “Ask the Penis Monster” game. Let me know if you’d rather have a penis-free story and I’ll try and think of one, lol.

- **Anything else you’d like to say?**

Thanks for writing a book about Flash!